1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

quently, on the banks of some creek or river in Tiklauila territory, a party wanting to cross would scout around and find a canoe hidden in the weeds. Everybody would use it to cross, and the question "Whose canoe is it?" would elicit the reply, "Oh, it's always there and everybody uses it who wishes to cross." But if the question were "Who made it in the first place and put it there?" the answer would be, "Probably Timalarua. He likes making canoes; he makes them all the time." He also liked making spears and posts, though he was not as generous with them as Tu'untalumi. When one of his posts appeared at a funeral, people would point it out admiringly saying, "Timalarua made that one" and the speaker would trace the lines and designs on it with his finger, using much the same gestures as an art critic in a modern gallery. When a post by Tu'untalumi was identified and admired, however, the admiration was for Tu'untalumi the generous person rather than Tu'untalumi the artist. One was a wonderful craftsman, the other was a wonderful man. But acclaim given to the song and dance performances of the two men was just the reverse: the dances of Timalarua were adequate but not outstanding, those of Tu'untalumi were in a class by themselves.

Comparison of the activities of these two old men illustrates the impossibility of drawing any line, in the simpler cultures at least, between artistic production and technological production. The canoes and the posts manufactured by Timalarua and the posts manufactured and the new dances created by Tu'untalumi were all, so to speak, in the same category, as far as the Tiwi were concerned. The distinction we might make between the canoes as "useful" products and the posts and dances as ceremonial or artistic products never occurred to them. All were objects or products which only successful old men had the required skill and leisure to make. The fact that one old man liked to make canoes and leave them around for other people to use, and another old man liked to compose dances and perform his compositions widely for other people to enjoy, to them merely indicated individual taste and choice; it did not make the first a craftsman and the second an artist. This point has been overlooked in most of the theorizing about primitive art; perhaps a necessary first step in the development of primitive artists is for a society to be able to provide a few men with enough leisure time to be able to cultivate what might perhaps best be called hobbies, since a hobby can equally well be something "useful" to society, like canoe making, or something personally satisfying, like dancing or decorating graveposts.

The huge, heavy, painted spears made by these old Tiwi men were mainly used only for display, and even the oldest men were positive that this had always been the tradition. In fact, they seemed a little shocked at the implication that such beautiful and valuable objects could ever have been used for such mundane purposes as hunting or warfare. The cutting and painting of such spears took time and skill—more time than a gravepost—and no important man went to the smallest gathering without bearing on his shoulder at least half a dozen of these symbols of his importance. If on his way through the bush he sighted a kangaroo, he dropped his painted spears and stalked the animal with an ordinary spear, or more probably left it to the young men in the party who carried only ordinary ones.

1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
O120 Tiwi O120

in the party who carried only ordinary ones. The painted spears were symbols of wealth and status and roughly corresponded to white tie and tails in our culture. No important man could afford not to have them, even though for most of the year they were unused. Before leaving home on a journey, it was often necessary for a man to renew the paint on his spears, for it rubbed off easily. Since paint was an aspect of ritual, its use, even the renewal of old paint, was senior men's prerogative; women were not supposed to touch it.[8] The analogy with formal dress even extended to the borrowing of ceremonial spears. An important man, caught short of them, might borrow some from a contemporary who had plenty, and though everybody would know that his spears were borrowed, he at least was properly dressed for the occasion, though stark naked otherwise.

Baskets made of bark with gummed sides were made by the women, but the painted designs upon these baskets were applied by the men, in line with their monopoly on all work that required paint. These baskets of various sizes but little variation in shape were used for all domestic tasks involving the collection, storing, transporting, and preparing of vegetable foods, and were sufficiently watertight to enable water also to be carried in them. Ordinary wooden spears (without barbs or painted designs) and a great variety of throwing sticks were made by all men, young or old, but important old men bothered with them very little, considering such routine manufacture beneath them. These workaday spears and throwing sticks lay around every camp in abundance, and a man who needed spears or sticks in a hurry could always gather up a bundle in a few minutes. Small boys picked up the techniques of making spears and throwing sticks by spending time with older boys who in turn improved their skill both in making and using hunting weapons by spending time with the local young men.

Although much of this learning was fairly random, other instruction was not. During his initiation period a youth spent long intervals isolated in the bush with a couple of older teachers from whom he received training in religious and ritual matters. At the same time, of course, it was inevitable that the novice absorb some of the older men's experience in bushcraft. There was no corresponding initiation period for girls. What they learned, they learned first from the older women of their childhood household and later from the older women of the husband's household into which they moved as child-brides after puberty. In all households the supervision by the elderly women of all younger women included the training of both female children and young wives in the things all females should know—things which were mostly concerned with collecting and preparing vegetable foods and the making of baskets.

In pre-white times Tiwi males wore no clothing whatever. The Mission insisted on calico loincloths, but, at least in the 1928-29 period, one could

[8] Female mourners were required to daub their bodies with white clay as a sign of mourning, but this paint was smeared haphazardly over their bodies and faces without any attempt at regularity or design, in contrast to the careful paint designs on the men's bodies.

1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

observe the spontaneous gesture with which men, on leaving the Mission, automatically threw off their loincloths at the Mission fence and headed for the bush as naked as the day they were born. Women, in pre-white days, habitually carried a piece of bark which they held in front of themselves whenever they met a male. As soon as string or rope was introduced by the early white contacts, the women found it more convenient to tie some sort of band around their waists and double the piece of bark over this waistband. This was much handier since it left the hands free, but the bark, being stiff and unsecured, was at best a very capricious covering, and old women in the midst of public arguments often tore off their aprons and threw them at their opponents as a gesture of contempt.

Young women were more decorous and fussed modestly with their bark aprons when young men were present rather in the same way as American coeds fuss with their skirts in crowded classrooms. Theoretically, young women were supposed never to meet either young men or men outside their own household, and so the bark apron, carried in the hand, was in aboriginal times merely something to have in case of emergency. It was noticeable in Tiwi ceremonies that when the women danced, they did nothing with their hands. We think this was because, in pre-white days, their right hands, at least, were needed to hold their bark aprons in front of their pubic regions, since at dances they were in the presence of strange men.

This brief account of the daily and yearly life of the Tiwi households enables us to draw a few important conclusions about their economic life:

1. Compared with many of the mainland tribes, the Tiwi were economically rather well-off, in that the bigger household units were usually able to produce a food surplus.

2. This food surplus varied directly with the number of working wives that a household head possessed.

3. A household head with many wives was therefore, in Tiwi terms, a wealthy man who could retire entirely from the food quest and devote his time to other activities.

4. Such men were able to devote full time to other activities such as manufacturing useful and ceremonial objects and participation in ceremonial affairs and public life.

5. Wealthy men, active in one or all of these pursuits, were the "big men" of the tribe. In each band there were two or three such men, and in the whole tribe perhaps less than twenty had attained full success or were ranked by public opinion as being the most admired and influential. The next chapter examines the career patterns by which every male Tiwi sought to become, and a few succeeded in becoming, a big man.